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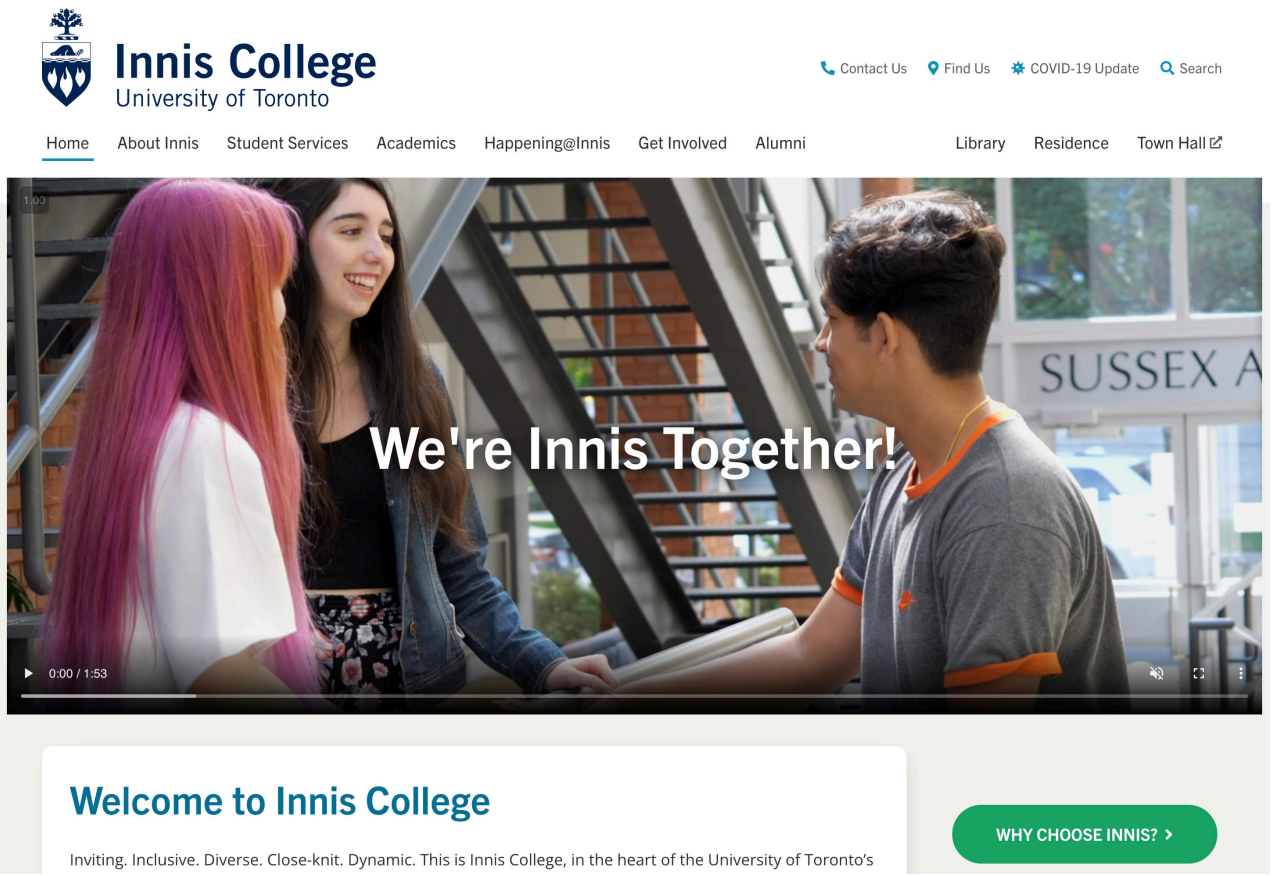
"We're Innis Together!": Strengthening Innis Identity through its New Website Launch

Angelina Zahajko
INNIS LIFE



We live in a world of abundant space; no matter where you are in the world, you are likely to look around and identify spaces for housing, sidewalks, parks, and more. It is not until we situate ourselves within these spaces that those spaces become places, the house becomes the home, the sidewalk becomes the stage for the meet-cute, the abstract space develops a concrete and personal meeting.

Places embody the hearts of the communities within them; they are areas that spark a sense of belonging and facilitate connection. However, as our world evolves and becomes more globalized, our definition of place has also expanded into the digital realm. The internet has become a world of abundant space, therefore, it is now more important than ever to design digital spaces that reflect the communities that they inhabit.

From the moment the homepage of Innis College's newly launched website appears, a diverse array of students are splashed in a montage across your screen. They are interacting with each other, throwing their heads back in laughter, engaging in deep conversations. They are also interacting within the various defining geographies of the college like the Innis Green and the Student Commons. Across these snapshots of everyday life, a pun that is just corny enough to be perfectly Innis stares back at you: "We're Innis Together."

On October 14th, 2021, Innis College launched its new website, one that was designed to emulate and serve the student community that lies at the heart of its being. This is in stark contrast to the website that had served Innisians in recent years: impersonal, static, and contained information and services diluted over eleven different websites. While it functioned as a digital space that gave its information to students—albeit, with a little savvy searching—it had yet to become a place that students could see themselves in.

When Innis College President Charlie Keil began his term back in 2015, one of the very first objectives that he prioritized at his first Innis College Council meeting was a "redesign of an integrated college website." Securing a web developer took time but by the winter of 2019, an all-star group composed of Keil and three other Innis administration members had formed, eager to take on the task of redesigning Innis' virtual space from scratch.

"All of us who have been involved have lived and breathed that website for the past two years," President Keil reminisced. "We met weekly—sometimes for meetings as long as three hours—and we continued that way for about a year and a half."

As consumers, a website can often feel like merely a body that you inhabit to get where you need to go. What often goes unnoticed is the acute level of detail that goes into the colour scheme, the website headings, and all of the small details that are easily taken for granted. Ben Weststrate, Communications Officer at Innis College and a member of the website committee, gave us an insight into those details in an interview with *The Herald*.

"You hear these qualities about Innis College and see them substantiated over and over again [among the faculty and students]. Innis is tightly knit, it's a sort of a warm place, it's familiar, it's a place where everybody knows your name. Those qualities resonated with us and we wanted to represent them within the website," Weststrate explained.

Creating an authentic atmosphere for the website was key; therefore, just shortly after the website committee was formed, one staff and two student focus groups were established for consultation.

Keil explained, "Early on, we asked ourselves: Who is it for?; Who is your prima-

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ry user group? We decided that the primary user group was students... That's why the focus groups became so important... User testing was both about the aesthetics and the ethos [of the website], but it was also about the usability and applicability of all those characteristics."

According to the website committee, this balance of capturing the "ethos" of Innis without providing an exhaustive amount of resources proved to be laborious, but it was important so that the website served the group dependent on it most.

Weststrate elaborated, "The thing that anchored all of us throughout this process—the committee, the web developer, the copywriter—was that this was going to be a student-centred site... For example, under the 'Student Services' section, [the options] are framed around supports... The labels and precise language make it more intuitive for the students to find what they need."

In terms of usability, this precise labelling and concentration of services in one place are what stand out the most compared to the old interface. Whereas the old website had six broad headings across the top and fourteen hyperlinks to other Innis/U of T services across the side, the new website has nine specific headings across the top that further break down into more niche resources. As it stands, a student would have to get work to get lost in this organized, digestible digital space.

Earlier this year, *The Varsity* published an opinion piece on the disparities between the federated and constituent colleges under U of T's broader college system. In the piece, the author wrote that Innis College's website, while not as outdated as its other constituent counterparts, was "similarly outdated and off-putting."

Since its conception, Innis College has always been an institution that fought to establish a well-defined space for its students to thrive within. In a conversation with one of Innis College's first presidents Peter Russell earlier this year, he explained to me that when Innis College was establishing itself in the 1960s, it lacked a physical space: "In the early days, it was a college with a principal and a governing council—no students yet, no building!".

Years later, when Russell was offered the presidency in 1971, he told then-President Claude Bissell that he would accept the role but only if Bissell "guaranteed him the $1.5 million it would cost to build a new building for the college." While many faculty and students at the time argued that a new building was unnecessary, Russell said, "It was time for Innis College to have a home, for the sake of its students and our identity."

50 years later, this new website rebranding and the highly-anticipated expansion and renovation project of the college's physical building are both extensions of that desire to strengthen Innis College's identity.

"[The relaunch is] not about resurrection or damage control or a decision that comes from this sort of deficit—it's quite the opposite of that," Weststrate concluded, "In both a virtual space or a physical space, we are going to create an environment within which the community can do what it does best—you know, [we're] giving it the space that it's due to continue to thrive and grow. That's the business I am interested in."

Covid Robbed Us of our Independence, or Did It?

Catherine Dume
STUDENT LIFE

When I was younger, the concept of university was fed to me through the TV shows and movies I watched as a child. Movies like *High School Musical 3*, *Legally Blonde*, *Monsters University*, and *The Social Network*, all played a role in how I ended up perceiving university as this place where you cut ties, get drunk on the weekend, have sex, and occasionally study to get those straight A's. Basically, university was the time in a young person's life where after eighteen years of following the rules of the house, they were set free to do whatever they wished: it was supposed to be liberating. No more strings attached to reel you in when you make a mistake, no more parents telling you that you can't eat ice cream on the couch or that you can't stay up all night watching K-dramas or playing video games. It was this sort of freedom and independence that was every child's dream. Everyone told us, "Wait until you're eighteen (or older)," as if that's when the true fun begins. "Then you can let loose," as if the concept of consequences doesn't exist anymore.

So, we all waited patiently until we graduated and entered university life. For me, the first four months of 2019 were a bliss. As a Christian and a commuter, my first year was what others may call 'restrictive' and 'boring' because I was in and out of campus, never seeing the "nightlife." But even between classes, I experienced a sense of freedom I never had before. In the city, I was free to hop onto the TTC, explore Toronto, and try different cultural foods. From the bubble tea at Chatime near St. George to different types of ramen at Ramenya and Magic Noodle. I even determined which cafe had the best hot chocolate, the food truck called '18-Feet' that used to be on St. George street, sandwiched between Innis College and Robarts (however due to the pandemic they are no longer on campus. Now my favorite is the volunteer cafe at Victoria College).

Then, January 4th rolled around and the news of this mysterious virus started emerging. It wasn't until March 15th that we experienced our first lockdown. Our view on life drastically changed. Jokes about '2020 vision' started to diminish as we realized that the reality we were so comfortably accustomed to was gone forever. Most of us were forced to return to our families after a few short months of independent bliss only to be stuck there for two years.

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Even now, as campus opens up, first-year students will never know that sense of freedom we had back in 2019. Everywhere we go we are required to show identification to access the building. Every time I sign into U-Check, I'm constantly reminded of the dystopia I now live in, where the overarching body that is U of T controls my very actions. But U of T is only a middleman, so is the Canadian Government. The real boss is COVID. It was as if COVID robbed us of our independence; the life we were supposed to have as young adults.

Yet, despite the restrictions, I have been able to find a sliver of independence while at home with my lovely family. Before COVID, I was used to buying lunch whenever I didn't have any leftovers or sandwiches to make. As a student with no income, it probably wasn't very wise to spend my money this way, but it was the case. I didn't cook simply because I didn't know how to. I now know how to boil an egg, bake chicken, and make my famous sweet potato casserole. Had I been living on campus in my first year, I would have been making store-bought ramen every night for dinner.

Stuck at home, with a lot of time on my hands, I actually learned how to cook. I baked, I experimented, and I made dishes for my family once or twice a week. Since school started I haven't been able to cook much, but at least I know what to do when I have to. I have grown more confident when using the stove.

Other than food, I have become more confident regarding finding jobs, understanding money and budgeting. I still have a long way to go before I'm fully independent and can make important decisions regarding my career, but COVID, although horrible, allowed me to take a break and learn new skills.

The Raptors Are Rebuilding, But It's Not As Bad As You Might Think

Kyle Newcombe
SPORTS

All sports rebuilds begin with a teardown. It is the easiest and fastest part, but also the hardest for loyal fans. For the Toronto Raptors, this was represented by the blockbuster sign-and-trade of long-time fan favourite Kyle Lowry. The details of such a deal are a little complex, but the end result was this: the Raptors traded Lowry to the Miami Heat in return for Goran Dragić and Precious Achiuwa.

As a pretty serious Raptors fan, I think I speak for everyone when I say that Kyle Lowry is sorely missed. He is an all-star basketball talent, an amazing leader, and the fiery engine that pushed the Raptors' team to new heights each season he played for them. First acquired by the Raptors in 2012, Lowry was not initially too happy about playing in Toronto, but overtime, he grew to love the city along with his new pal DeMar DeRozan, who the Raptors drafted in 2009. Following the news of the Lowry trade, fan tributes and well wishes poured in on social media making the breakup more than amicable. After all, it was just good business for all involved. Toronto was looking to retool and an aging star like Lowry was the obvious starting point. Thus, the teardown began.

After the teardown comes the reconstruction; the building of a new, better team through drafting, signing, and developing new talent. Fortunately, the Raptors have an excellent track record and an enormous head start in this area. You will notice that the Raptors traded just one star-caliber player in Kyle Lowry. They still have plenty of talent leftover to build around. Pascal Siakam and Fred VanVleet are now full-on stars in their own right and were developed right here in Toronto.

As a 27th overall pick and an undrafted free agent, Pascal Siakam and Fred VanVleet respectively have been huge success stories over the last few seasons. In 2017, I attended the Raptors 905 G-League championship game where they won the title. Siakam and VanVleet both played in that game. Today, they are the indisputable leaders of this Raptors team and have proved themselves time and time again.

Aside from the retention of serious star power in Siakam and VanVleet, the unconventional nature of the Raptors rebuild is further exemplified by the fast action that was taken. You may recall that the Raptors won the NBA title not that long ago in 2019, and then they made it to game seven of the second round of the 2020 playoffs in the pandemic "bubble" in Florida. They only had one losing season before deciding to rebuild: the 2020-21 season.

The 2020-21 season was very frustrating for Raptors fans. As someone who watched about 80% of the games that season, it was almost maddening to see the Raptors get so close to recovering again and again after their abysmal start, but in the end, it did not end up working out. One underperforming season where they missed the playoffs was all Raptors management needed to see. They immediately pulled the trigger on a team restructuring. The Raptors have such a strong winning culture and as a fan, I appreciate the decisive actions taken right away, rather than letting the team flounder for a season or two to see what happens.

Of course, there were benefits to having a subpar record last season. Namely, a higher pick in the 2021 NBA draft. The NBA operates a draft lottery wherein all teams that did not make the playoffs the previous season are randomly selected to determine which order they will draft between the first and fourteenth overall picks, with worse

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teams having a better chance at a higher pick. The Raptors were participants in the lottery for the first time since 2013, a testament to their prolonged success in the Masai Ujiri/Kyle Lowry era.

In their first draft lottery in seven years, the Raptors got lucky. They nabbed the fourth pick behind Detroit, Houston, and Cleveland, with only a 33% chance of making it that high. With their pick, they selected Scottie Barnes, a forward from Florida State.

The pick was not without controversy, as top draft picks often are. Many fans and league commentators believed that Jalen Suggs, a guard from Gonzaga, was the better pick. I was surprised by the Raptors' pick of Barnes, but I'm happy to say I have been very impressed with his performance thus far. Scottie had an excellent showing at NBA Summer League in Las Vegas and through the first fifteen games this season has put up a 16PTS/8REB/3AST per-game stat line while playing 35 minutes a game and shooting 51% from the field.

Plus, the stats do not take into account Scottie's off-court presence. He is a natural leader with an excellent reputation and has embraced the city of Toronto, as well as the passionate Raptors fans that come with it. Fans were overjoyed to see Scottie touring the city, eating at iconic local restaurants, and even meeting up with Drake all before the season started. There is no easier way to endear yourself to Raptors fans than by actually wanting to play in Toronto.

Aside from the Raptors' new young star, the rest of the roster is showing promise. OG Anunoby is continuing to grow as a player and remains a defensive powerhouse; Gary Trent Jr. has proved that he is better than his former bench role in Portland suggested; fan favourite Canadians Khem Birch and Chris Boucher are back; young prospects Precious Achiuwa and Svi Mykhailiuk are getting solid minutes; Goran Dragić is doing what he can at age 35; and 2020 first-round pick Malachi Flynn is on a mission to prove himself as a serious game-time option for the team. There are many positives to work with, now it is about putting it all together and consistently winning games.

Inconsistency is a typical characteristic of a rebuilding team, and this Raptors squad is no exception. There have been multiple highs and lows already. Perhaps the best example is the Raptors curb-stomping the Boston Celtics on October 22nd, beating them in their home arena by 32 and then losing to them by 16 less than three weeks later in the same building. Needless to say, the team is not yet performing to its full potential, and there is still quite a bit of practice and team-building needed before they really appear as a cohesive unit.

Fortunately for fans, this will likely happen faster than they might think. Since the teardown was rather short compared to other rebuilds, the reconstruction should be similarly swift. The Raptors have retained all of their homegrown talent and have added even more development potential in Barnes. There may be a few more roster moves before this is all over and fans should expect some further turbulence in the near future. It may not look pretty right now, but with a talented team core, a world-class front office staff, and passionate fans once again filling the stands in Scotiabank Arena, the Raptors are poised to make a lot of progress this season. This should be exciting for everyone, regardless of their exact record.

The COP26 Rundown: What It Is, What Came Out of It, and What Canada Needs To Do Better

Kiran Basra
SCIENCE

From October 31st to November 13th, 2021, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's Conference of Parties was held in Glasgow, Scotland. 21,000 diplomats and activists from 200 countries, including 130 world leaders, met to discuss the problem of climate change and what countries would commit to fixing it. Marches took place all over the world—including 100,000 people in Glasgow itself—as prominent activists pushed for stricter measures.

In 1992, 197 countries agreed to join the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which includes meeting once a year for a UN forum called a Conference of Parties (COP). All countries are represented at COPs. This means that impoverished and developing countries, which tend to be disproportionately impacted by climate change, get an equal voice at the table. Delayed by a year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, COP26 was especially important because it marks 5 years since the Paris Agreement of 2015. The Paris Agreement specifies that all countries that signed must meet every five years (informally called a 'ratchet' year) with new, more ambitious goals to help fight climate change. These goals are called Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

The most important revision from COP26 seems surprisingly small: countries agreed to meet and revise their NDCs on a yearly basis, instead of every five years. Until global carbon emissions are reduced to safe levels, countries will have to come back every year and present a new NDC—which means laypeople and activists can put more pressure on these countries every year to present stronger measures against climate change. Speeding up the pace of climate negotiations is crucial since scientists say this next decade is essential to combating climate change. If we went five years with no change, it would be too late.

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The second revision was to the goals of COP26 itself. This is the first agreement that explicitly mentioned cutting back fossil fuels. Additionally, when the Paris Agreement specifies its goal to keep the world's temperature rise 'well below 2°C' (above pre-Industrial Revolution levels), it has now been revised to a more ambitious 1.5°C. It is necessary, though, since scientists say a rise in temperature above 1.5°C comes with far worse change: heatwaves, water shortages, crop failures, and ecosystem collapse. The world is already at 1.1°C above pre-Industrial Revolution levels, though, which means a big change needs to happen: the world's carbon emissions must be down to 45% by 2030 and be at 'net zero' by 2050.

The document was also going to commit to 'phase out' coal until India at the last moment insisted it be changed to 'phase down' coal. Coal is where most of India's energy comes from, and the country threatened to pull out of the agreement unless the wording was changed. Alok Sharma, the leader of COP26 on behalf of the United Kingdom, had made phasing out coal his personal goal for the conference. However, he accepted this change out of fear the entire document would come apart since the conference was already one day over its scheduled time limit. While closing COP26, he personally apologized to smaller countries for this change in wording.

Canada submitted a new NDC in July of 2021. Our goals have been changed to a 40–45% reduction of carbon emissions (compared to 2005 levels) by 2030, as opposed to the previously promised reduction of 30%. The new goal is to be at net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Wealthy nations (including Canada) have been encouraged to give aid in climate change funding to poorer countries, and Canada has pledged 5.3 billion USD. Canada's policies don't match up to its goals though; our carbon emissions have not decreased very much since 2015, and most of the money we pledged in aid in 2015 wasn't spent.

However, this summer the Canadian Net-Zero Emissions Accountability Act was passed, which makes implementing these policies a law. Even if the administration changes, Canada is still responsible to give an annual report on the current climate change targets. When these targets are missed, Canada's failure will be publicly assessed, and the government will be held accountable. To implement these changes, Canada is using the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate, which includes 50 concrete actions and was developed in consultation with Indigenous peoples. It focuses on 4 key pillars: pricing carbon pollution, complementary actions to reduce emissions, adaptation and climate resilience, and clean technology, innovation, and jobs. Canada has also committed to conserving 25% of our marine spaces by 2025 and 30% by 2030. In conjunction with the United Nations, Canada has joined the Adaptation Action Coalition, partnering with Germany to rebuild trust in the UN's international climate finance campaign, while also focusing on empowering women, girls, and Indigenous peoples to fight climate change.

The UNFCCC was created in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit and went into action in 1994. It was responsible for drafting the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which was unpopular with developed countries because it didn't ask countries with newly emerging economies to curb their emissions, and there were consequences for countries that didn't meet their requirements. It was replaced in 2015 with the Paris Agreement, which required developing countries to curb their emissions (at a different pace), and no longer has reinforcement measures for countries that don't meet their NDCs. The Paris Agreement is infamous among climate activists for not being strict enough, and countries tend to submit NDCs that aren't calculated to reach the ultimate goals of the Paris Agreement.

However, setting goals and reaching them are two very different things. Even with countries promising to cut their carbon emissions, they have been steadily rising since 2015 as policies go unimplemented. With worldwide current policies, by 2050 the world temperature will be 2.7°C above pre-Industrial Revolution levels, resulting in catastrophic damage. Even if every country met the goals they have set in their NDCs, the world would be at 2.1°C. To reach the Paris Agreement, Canada would have to cut its carbon emissions by 54% by 2030. Since Canada is a comparatively rich country with a comparatively small population, our more important task is helping developing countries do the same.

At COP26, Simon Kofe, the foreign minister for Tuvalu, gave a speech standing knee-deep in water to illustrate that with a rise in temperature of more than 1.5°C, his entire country would be underwater. World leaders need to commit to change, and quickly. While turning our lights off and taking public transit is important, the average person does not contribute that much to climate change; 100 companies are responsible for 71% of global greenhouse gas emissions. What we can do is pressure our government to implement the policies it has promised to implement and to put pressure on those companies for us. In 11 months, COP27 provides an opportunity to make our voices heard again. We must hope that our governments listen.

COP26: Nothing but Empty Words, No Action, and Accessibility

Catherine Dume
POLITICS

As every journalist, blogger, and influencer talks about COP26 and its new deals for climate change, one of the biggest voices is Swedish activist Greta Thunberg. Thunberg critiques the frivolousness of these conferences, stating that they are nothing but "blah, blah, blah"—empty words with no actions. While some say the same about the 18-year-old, who only critiques leadership without offering solutions in return, her words hold weight, especially regarding one story that seemed to be overshadowed by the drama of the apocalyptic future that we may be heading towards. This story is about how the United Nations (UN), the champion of human rights, fails to be accessible.

Israeli minister and wheelchair user, Karine Elharrar, tweeted, "Sad the UN does not provide accessibility to its events." Later, Elharrar informed journalists that despite informing organizers of her needs in advance, the shuttle bus she was offered was not wheelchair accessible. Thus, she had to be deferred to another vehicle that was not allowed to enter the compound.

This incident is not the only case of inaccessibility that unfortunately occurred during the conference. According to Disability News Service (DNS), there was a failure to provide British Sign language interpreters and captions for the broadcasts at COP26.

Another incident regarding the closure of the accessibility entrance was when Jason Boberg from Sustained Ability Disability and Climate Network said that not only was he unable to join the conference, but the closure had also led to the injury of some of his colleagues. Boberg and others had to wait until the afternoon to enter when the accessibility entrance was opened, which caused them to miss some of the events.

The significance of these incidents reveals that the UN, which published the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* back in 2008, may not follow its own policies, essentially rendering that document, and future ones, nothing but empty promises to individuals with accessibility needs around the world. The fact that the UN's lack of accessibility impacted influential people who attended COP26 only highlights that society forgets even the most important people in the room when it comes to accessibility. As Greta Thunberg eloquently put it, world leaders and organizations should be held accountable not by their words but by their actions. After all, actions speak louder than words. Obviously society needs to be more accountable, but it is the *how* that adds nuance to those words. We need more than policies, rules, and legislation that speaks about equality and equity. We need concrete, detailed plans to implement policies that ensure every wheelchair user is able to get around the city and enter any building with ease. It may require the redesigning of modern and old architecture to do so, but if it grants accessibility, just do it.

I know that when we talk about accessibility everyone gets tight-lipped and considers the cost of it all, but I assure you it is worth every penny. Not only does an accessible city do wonders for those who need it, but it is also designed to make everyone's life easier.

With these incidents at the UN and the issue of the plastic straw ban, one would think that accessibility and keeping our Earth green are incompatible. It is only when society forgets about the needs of people with disabilities when crafting their green policies and products that they are inaccessible. It is possible to save the planet and the humans who live within it; it just requires more intentional consideration and collaboration.

"DO NOT CONSUME": The Terrifying Tale of a River Turned Toxic — The Water Shortage in Inqaluit

Mackenzie Da Silva
POLITICS

Towards the end of October, Iqaluit, Nunavut announced that the city was in a state of emergency due to fuel found in water samples. Not only were residents unable to drink tap water since the contamination was discovered, but daily water uses ranging from hand washing to equipment sterilization at hospitals were also negatively impacted.

It would be heedless to think of Iqaluit's water crisis as independent from Canada's long history of environmental racism. Environmental racism can be understood as policies and actions regarding issues that target racialized communities and put them in danger. In Iqaluit's case, it is where toxic waste is dumped. In Canada, environmental racism disproportionately affects Indigenous communities and is a deliberate act of racism, as exemplified by the Coastal Gaslink Pipeline project, where a pipeline is being installed throughout British Columbia to transport gas.

Communities such as the Wet'suwet'en have been protesting against this pipeline's construction. Installing the pipeline so close to Indigenous communities could be hazardous to their health as gas is being transported past them every day. The mere construction of the pipeline also encroaches on their land rights.

Despite these concerns, construction

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on the pipeline was not halted. If you visit the Coastal GasLink website, you will be greeted with the quote, "Health and safety is our number one value."

It is important to note that while the world has slowed down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, work on building the pipeline continues.

This is just one example of environmental racism in Canada. Environmental racism is so prominent in Canada that there is even an Ontario region nicknamed "Chemical Valley" near Sarnia, which houses 40% of the country's chemical industry. A 2017 study by the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario found that the pollution from Chemical Valley disproportionately affects the Aamjiwnaang community.

While these examples are fairly recent, environmental racism in Canada is by no means a recent issue and has been prevalent since the first colonial settlements. The present situation of environmental racism in Canada brings us back to the water shortage in Iqaluit.

Since Iqaluit's water has been declared contaminated, the Canadian Armed Forces have arrived on site to deliver clean drinking water. They have also set up equipment for what CTV News terms 'reverse osmosis water purification'.

The challenge, however, is that Canada's water purification units have been previously used in warmer climates. Running these units in Iqaluit in late October will prove a new challenge, one that Canada's water purification team says they are up for.

Additionally, according to Nunavut News, a water monitoring system has been installed through which residents can now access filtered water for daily use. The monitoring system is said to provide real-time detection of concentrations of different hydrocarbons in the water, notifying the water treatment plant operators when necessary.

Quick action is necessary for a crisis such as Iqaluit's water shortage, but the question still lingers: has the damage already been done? CTV News reports that Nunavut's chief public health officer, Dr. Michael Patterson, has told residents that the health risks for those who consumed the contaminated tap water are very low. *Nunavut News* confirms that the government of Nunavut will publicly present the data they have collected thus far at an unspecified future date.

The concern continues to persist however as Patterson updates residents that they may still smell fuel in their water, even though the city has dealt with the contaminated tank. Nunavut News reports that the "do not consume" order still remains, so using tap water to drink or cook with is unsafe. However, the water may now be used for laundry, cleaning, bathing, and dish washing. According to Nunavut News, the current hydrocarbon levels detected in Iqaluit's tap water do not pose long-term health risks.

The repercussions of Iqaluit's only hospital being shut down due to the inability to properly wash hands and sterilize equipment are also being felt. As *The Globe and Mail* reports, the mother of resident Janet Pitsiulaaq Brewster was sent on a flight to Ottawa after requiring an emergency procedure that would have otherwise been available at Iqaluit's Qikiqtani General Hospital.

While the damage has been done and temporary solutions have been provided, more is required from the Canadian government to cover the cost of what needs to be repaired. NDP leader, Jagmeet Singh, has called on the federal government to cover the $180 million required to permanently solve Iqaluit's water problem. Singh pointed out that for years, Nunavut has received a lack of funding from the federal government, and their current water crisis is a result of this negligence.

After careful investigation, the city of Iqaluit has been able to trace its water contamination back to an underground tank that had not been upgraded since 1962. Reports have indicated that residents could have begun smelling fuel in their drinking water as early as October 2nd.

According to CTV News, Singh urged the federal government to imagine how they would have immediately stepped in and fixed the issue, no matter the cost, if the water had been contaminated in Vancouver or Toronto. Singh suggested the government apply the same urgency and care to Iqaluit. Due to the long history of environmental racism in Canada, there is no quick fix to the issue. However, Ecojustice.ca describes a few initiatives on their website that could help position the country to better support its Indigenous communities and prevent more crises from occurring in the future.

These include calling on the federal government to update the Canadian Environmental Protection Act, making it more suitable to today's modern age, as well as passing Bill C-230, which is in the consideration stage as of June 2021 according to the Canadian Parliament website. Passing Bill C-230 would mean that the Minister of Environment and Climate Change in Canada would be required to plan and develop a national strategy to remedy the harms caused by environmental racism.

The residents of Iqaluit have not been able to drink tap water for a month. I encourage us as citizens of Toronto at the University of Toronto to think about what Singh proposed: how would the same issue be handled if it occurred here in our major city? I encourage readers to explore the internet for sources, such as Ecojustice.ca, to learn what we can do to educate ourselves and listen to the communities affected by environmental racism. What we can do to work towards the end goal of dismantling the injustices ever-present in Canada.

CREDITS: THE CANADIAN PRESS/EMMA TRANTER

winter break blues

Mayumi Ramos

PLAYLIST

You know that weird, liminal period of time during winter break, after the holidays have passed, but before school starts again? It's 1:38 AM and you're languishing in your room, looking outside at your suburban neighbourhood. The winter sky refuses to turn pitch-black—it's this eerie, foggy, murky grey-blue colour—and the houses on your street still have their Christmas lights up, but they haven't turned them on for days. You feel a strange sadness, but you feel guilty about it because damn it, this was supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year! And yet, all you can bring yourself to do is put on the saddest playlist you have and lie facedown on your bed, head buried in the pillow. Well, this is that playlist.

It starts off with Julia Jacklin lyrically painting a melancholic picture of a depressing family party (so much for the holiday spirit, am I right?), then transitions into Phoebe Bridgers somberly—yet tenderly—reflecting on Christmas while convincing herself that the new year will be better. The next seven songs are soft, subdued, and understated. Then, it suddenly escalates with the last three songs, all of which are dreamlike, transcendent, and almost otherworldly; crescendoing with the last two verses of "Teenage Blue".

My favourite lyric ("Did you ever see a night so long / When time goes crawling by / The moon just went behind the cloud / I'm so lonesome I could cry") perfectly encapsulates the mood and atmosphere that this playlist creates. For 45 minutes and 3 seconds, it seems like you're the only one who exists in the world, and you're conflicted about whether you should revel in that feeling or try to get rid of it, because, God, you're just so *lonely*. Hopefully, you can take some comfort (or, more realistically, experience a catharsis) through these songs.

TRACKLIST

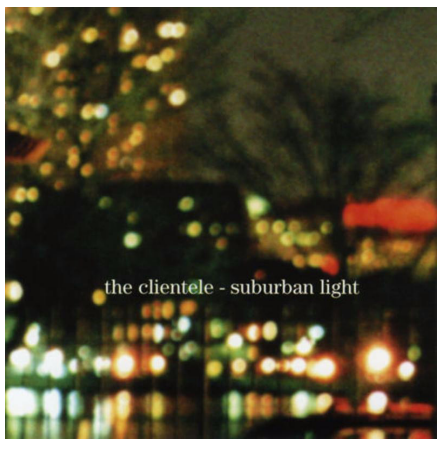
1. baby jesus is nobody's baby now — Julia Jacklin

2. If We Make It Through December — Phoebe Bridgers

3. cardigan (cabin in candlelight version) — Taylor Swift

4. I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry — Yo La Tengo

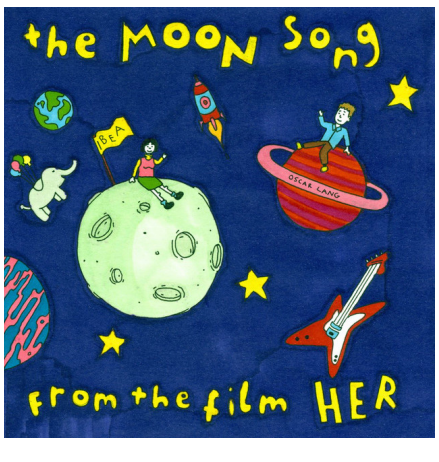
5. Pale Blue Eyes — The Velvet Underground



6. Reflections After Jane — The Clientele

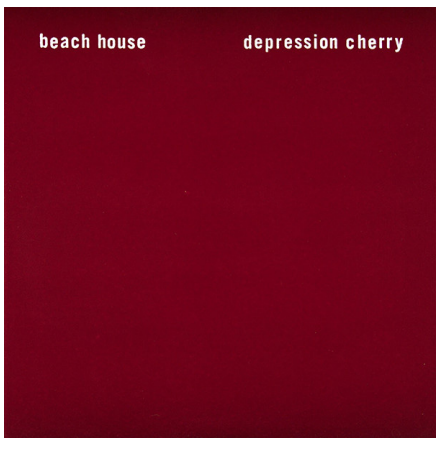
7. Baby Blue — King Krule

8. Some things Cosmic — Angel Olsen



9. The Moon Song — beabadoobee, Oscar Lang

10. Andromeda — Weyes Blood



11. Space Song — Beach House

12. Teenage Blue — Dreamgirl

Festive Peppermint Bark

Aminah Naseer *RECIPE*

Winter is coming! And the holidays are less than a month away! So, take out your hammers (just kidding!) and crush some candy cane, for this delicious chocolate peppermint bark recipe!

For this recipe you will need a simple flat pan (any size will do) and parchment paper! The smaller the pan, the thicker your chocolate bark will be.

You will also need milk and white chocolate chips. I prefer using Hersey's chocolate chips, but you can substitute any! I will also be adding food coloring, so I can achieve a holiday theme!

In addition to chocolate, you will need some peppermint candy canes and festive holiday sprinkles! If you don't like peppermint, you can use any flavor of candy cane. This is a scrumptious treat that is sure to entice your taste buds!

Now, let's begin!

INGREDIENTS *(for asterisks see notes below)*

- 2 cups milk chocolate chips
- 1 cup White chocolate chips
- 6 Peppermint candy canes (crushed)
- Holiday sprinkles (1-2 tablespoons)
- Red and green food coloring
- 1 cup of water
- Parchment paper
- Flat sheet pan
- Large glass bowl*
- Stove-safe pan**

NOTES

*Make sure that the glass bowl can fit inside the pan without touching the water

**Any stove safe pan will do if the glass bowl can fit over the pan without falling

INSTRUCTIONS

Step 0.5: Prepare a flat sheet pan by placing parchment paper on it. If the sheet pan is deep, then tape some parchment paper to all sides of the pan.

Step 1: Place your candy canes in a large Ziplock bag and thoroughly crush them until there are no large pieces remaining.

Step 2: Take a large glass bowl and place 2 cups of milk chocolate chips in it.

Step 3: Add 1 cup of water to the stove-safe pan, and make sure the glass bowl can fit safely over the pan without touching the water in the pan or falling into the pan.

Step 4: Place the water filled pan on the stove at medium high heat and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to a low simmer and wait for the water to calm down.

Step 5: Place the glass bowl with the milk chocolate chips, carefully over the pan.

Step 6: Continuously stir the chocolate and cook until it is liquid and fully melted. Do not stop stirring until the chocolate is fully melted.

Step 7: Pour the melted chocolate onto the parchment-lined sheet pan, evenly coating the entire pan.

Step 8: Place the milk chocolate layer in the fridge for 20 minutes to set.

Step 9: While the milk chocolate is setting, wash your medium glass bowl and add your white chocolate chips into it.

Step 10: Melt the white chocolate chips in the same way as the milk chocolate chips.

Step 11: Once the chocolate is melted, add a small drop of red food coloring and a small drop of green food coloring. After you add the drops, do not mix them yet.

Step 12: Remove the milk chocolate from the fridge and pour the white chocolate over the milk chocolate bark.

Step 13: Use the back of a spoon to swirl the green and red food coloring, making sure to leave white, green and red swirls on the chocolate.

Step 14: Sprinkle the crushed peppermint candy cane all over the chocolate and add as many holidays themed sprinkles as you like.

Step 15: Place the chocolate in the fridge for 20-30 minutes or until fully set. When hardened, remove the bark from the fridge and break it into pieces.

Step 16: Enjoy!

What's the deal with "Bad Art"?: My Take on Holiday Films In All Their Formulaic Glory

Ke Xu
ARTS AND CULTURE

Have you watched *Squid Game*? I have.

It was hard to get through October without it leaping at you from every source, be it social media, the news, or even just random people you met on the street. The show was the perfect blend of intense, character-driven drama, sharp social criticism and, hey, the money didn't hurt. Bloomberg says that the first season of the series is valued at nearly $900 million, having reached unprecedented levels of worldwide success. But as the spooky season transitions into holiday buzz, the hype of horror wanes and slows, as most of us return once again to our annual festive essentials. Turns out, *Squid Game* was an anomaly in the pool of success stories. Everyone knows that the true money lies in mass-market Christmas movies.

In 2021, the Hallmark Channel has planned the release of 66 original film programs, 36 of which are holiday-related. To date, each of them has been viewed at least a million times, and yet, I couldn't name a single one off the top of my head. Even so, the company just keeps churning them out, year after year after year, apparently to great success. A low budget coupled with increased viewership around the holidays leads to an annual money-farm in which large corporations, like Hallmark, just rake in the profit.

We all know the story. Boy meets girl in a quaint little holiday town. One of them is royal or at least a super-rich hotshot venture capitalist. Everyone's cute, everyone's charming. Everyone acts exactly the same. There's a scene where they go ice skating and another where they walk around a Christmas market or a town square, laughing underneath glistening garlands and fake powdered snow. In the end, the leading man will confess his love, at which point it's happily ever after for you and me and everyone.

Oh yes, and the town is also 90% white, and there are never any gay people.

Actually, that's not entirely true. Just last year, Hallmark debuted its first leading same-sex couple in their trailblazing movie, *The Christmas House*. Surprisingly, the film also featured an interracial couple. That's right, a single person of colour! That's two whole diversity boxes checked off the list! They're trying so hard, maybe we should cut them some slack.

Or, maybe not. Why are we supporting these companies again? Are we really such mindless consumers that we are content repeatedly watching the same films that we've seen hundreds of times before? Hallmark isn't churning out these movies for us, they're doing it for profit. Haven't we learned anything from *Squid Game*? To make matters worse, these movies are just objectively bad. They teach outdated values and hire lead actors that are already famous. There's nothing groundbreaking about it.

Then again, maybe I'm judging the films too harshly. After all, millions of people are tuning in to the channel every year, searching for warmth and comfort on cold, winter nights. These predictable holiday movies are just pumping us full of suffocating nostalgia and familiarity. They are always the same. When you put one on, you know exactly what you're getting the next hour and a half. It's the type of mind-numbing escapism that you just can't look away from.

But what's the deal with "bad art" anyway? Are we to claim that no entertainment has any value unless it's deemed "meaningful" by the almighty critics above? Not every film has to be the next big social commentary. Maybe we should just allow people to enjoy the things they enjoy on a purely subjective level.

Do I want to watch deep, thought-provoking films like *Parasite*, *Citizen Kane*, or *The Truman Show*? Of course. Am I in the mood to think at the moment? Absolutely not. The holiday season leaves us all wanting a little more relaxation and a little less "society is out to get you." I love it here in Toronto, but do I sometimes wish I was in one of those quaint little holiday towns with not a worry in the world? Why pretend? You already know I do.

Even so, I wonder: should we endorse corporations that settle for subpar, recycled programming when the mass viewership of these programs actually discourages producers from providing opportunities to undiscovered or undervalued creators? Honestly, I really don't know.

What I do know is that in the past few years, we have seen the increased popularity of brilliant works from artists and creators who are just as diverse as the stories they tell.

Are all of these works considered "high art"? Surely not. In fact, I can think of many diverse films and TV shows that have been critically panned, and yet, that doesn't make their existence any less important. Forcing inclusive media to constantly break new ground is exhausting, not only for the creators but for the viewers as well. The sentiment of "be better than us or get out" is constantly pushed onto BIPOC and LGBTQ+ creators by the predominantly white and cishet (cisgender and heterosexual) entertainment industry, and it's just so consciously oppressing. If the only way for certain groups of people to break into the industry is through utmost perfection, then it's really not inclusion but exploitation.

Diverse voices need to be heard in every genre, be it drama, horror, or even fluffy holiday films. As consumers, we cannot segregate media into distinct categories of "good art" that's diverse and "bad art" with no diversity at all. Instead, we must push for diverse, creative, and dedicated people to receive opportunities to tell the stories they want to tell. Whether it's groundbreaking shouldn't matter in the least.

This holiday season, I challenge Hallmark to think seriously about whether their holiday movies provide these kinds of opportunities. If they think hard enough, the breakthrough may even lead to unprecedented financial success.

Gatekeeping Art - Preserving or Decaying Vintage Music

Mayumi Ramos
ARTS AND CULTURE

Finding hidden gems is an obsession and one of the greatest pleasures of music fans. To me, there's nothing more satisfying than going down a Spotify or YouTube rabbit hole and stumbling across an amazing song from an artist with monthly listeners in the quadruple digits (the lower, the better). Suddenly, you're playing it on repeat and combing through their discography. Months later, to your dismay, you find that same song on a Spotify-curated playlist with 700,000 followers—or worse, a snippet of it becomes a viral audio on TikTok—and your satisfaction that stemmed from that pristine, untouched song that was so exquisitely yours, that hidden gem you worked so hard to find, is now in the ears of millions of people

Maybe we derive some kind of glory from discovering an artist while they're still unknown because it gives us a sense of validation—not only are we so brilliant at identifying talent, but we *deserve* to enjoy and indulge in these hidden gems because we worked oh-so-hard to find them. Or perhaps we delight in the esoteric quality of that music and being part of its limited audience. *Only a small number of people even know about this music, much less enjoy it—so I must be on an entirely different plane of individuality.* A prime example of this line of reasoning is the obsession of "Obscurify", a website that determines how obscure (or basic) your Spotify listening habits are, in some music circles, and especially on certain subreddits (looking at you, r/indieheads). Sure, we might poke fun at music snobs who ask people wearing band shirts to name three songs, but we can't deny that there's an "inner hipster" that lies inside of us all.

So when our favourite obscure song or artist blows up, it's easy to take it almost as a personal attack. Are we *really* original if the music is accessible to so many other people? We jump to rationalization and defense: *Well, it doesn't matter—they're just jumping on the bandwagon. I listened to them before they were cool.* There's a thin line between taking pride in your music taste and making it a personality trait, and it's one that I oscillate between. I won't lie, I'm the type of person who posts songs on my Instagram story; the type who has their Spotify linked in their bio. I've inextricably linked my identity to the music I consume, which is probably why I can sometimes get possessive over it. Everyone needs to know I have a good taste in music, but god forbid the songs I listen to actually go viral. But *why* are we so possessive over something as seemingly trivial as music taste?

Maybe it's because it isn't so trivial after all. Music is often deeply personal—we tend to like the songs that we like because it resonates with us in some capacity, especially emotionally. When that music reaches a broader, more expansive group, we become territorial because it feels like a personal infringement of our identity. That being said, I don't think gatekeeping is so much an actual active effort to prevent the spread of music, but more so a manifestation of the desire, however futile, to keep the things dear to us safe. We want to protect our music from the masses who just won't "get" it on the same level we do—from harsh critics who will coldly and unsympathetically pick it apart. We want to preserve its perfect, unspoiled qualities, or at least the perception we have of it, and gatekeeping is just a means to that end. When Pitchfork gives your favourite new album a 5.7, or when Anthony Fantano proclaims it's merely a "light to decent 6," or even when you read offhand YouTube comments, it's easy to either get a bit irritated or to doubt your own opinion, even just a little, no matter how hard we try to stick to our convictions. Gatekeeping is simply a prevention tactic—a method of averting that dreadful moment when the image of music we cherish and are trying to protect is altered or muddied by the opinions and analyses of others.

There are more tangible consequences of a smaller artist blowing up. In early 2018, I went to a Billie Eilish concert with my best friend. The tickets, which were *floor* tickets, were a whopping $21. Now, the cheapest nosebleed seats are upwards of $50, with floor tickets hovering in the thousands. In addition to the skyrocketing of concert ticket prices, artists tend to gravitate away from their original sound in favour of a more accessible sound to attract a wider audience. Being happy they've achieved mainstream success and exposure while simultaneously feeling a bit disappointed (and admittedly, frustrated) is an internal conflict that I still don't know how to resolve. As much as I want to root for my favourite artists, there's a part of me unwilling to "let them go" or to let others delight in my best-kept secret.

Nevertheless, gatekeeping music ultimately sacrifices the delight you get from sharing songs with others. In my opinion, it's completely valid to protect your music from the reach of the masses, as that often comes with harsh and unemotional criticism. But sharing a piece of music that you cherish (even if it isn't obscure) with someone special rewards you with a unique sort of intimacy—it's magical to experience that enjoyment and delight with someone else. I remember when I introduced *The Divine Feminine* by Mac Miller to my boyfriend and he just got it—we spent a while gushing about how good it was and talking about our favourite parts, and he pointed things out that I had never even noticed before. Or when one of my closest friends was experiencing a painful breakup, so I recommended *Crushing* by Julia Jacklin to her. It was validating to read her text about how cathartic it was to listen to lyrics that perfectly encapsulated what she was going through.

To hide your favourite music is to preserve it in its most pure form to be enjoyed by only you, free from outside judgment. But this so-called safeguarding of music comes with a price: the emotional connection you get from sharing it. Music is meant to be shared, listened to, and enjoyed—isn't that part of the reason why artists make it in the first place? Ironically, the real outsiders are the ones who participate in the gatekeeping of music and relish in the exclusivity of it—they're missing out on the intimacy and connection of shared listening.

The Curtain Calls: Broadway's Post-Pandemic Comeback

Celine Hajj Sleiman
ARTS AND CULTURE

Theatre goers and musical lovers mourned the loss of Broadway, as all 41 theatres fell victim to the necessary COVID-19 closures following the outbreak of the pandemic. Though the initial green light to reopen in September was given by the state in May 2021, it seemed an unlikely prospect in the face of vaccine hesitancy and the beginning of an aggressive new Delta variant.

Yet those who doubted were happily proven wrong. This September marked the return of musical theatre after the longest shut-down in New York City's history—a symbol of hope after 18 months of solitude. The Phantom resumed its 32-year haunt in Broadway's longest running show, *The Phantom of the Opera*, Simba returned to reclaim his throne in Disney's *The Lion King*, and Orpheus journeyed back to the Underworld in the award-winning *Hadestown*, which continues with its original cast after making its Broadway debut in 2019. Other returning shows include classics like *Wicked*, *Chicago*, *Moulin Rouge*, and *Hamilton*.

Under the condition of full vaccination or proof of a negative COVID-19 test result, most theatres are accepting audience-members at full capacity, but Broadway's grand return is not so easy as simply reopening the doors. The Broadway League's box office data reveals that attendance is at less than 80 percent capacity. Considering the lingering effects of lockdown culture, as well as the dwindling number of tourists—who typically make up two-thirds of Broadway audiences—these challenges, while not unexpected, do beg the question: Is Broadway's exclusivity no longer viable in a post-pandemic world?

Live theatre has always been a unique experience—the surge of music, the entrance of a well-loved performer, the infectious roar of applause. There is a unique kind of awe that follows witnessing something so perfectly executed—a refreshing entertainment in an age that has been redefined by isolated streaming. Theatre performance is arguably more demanding than acting in front of a camera, where mistakes can be erased, and more thrilling than any cinema, where the exact same performance is a guarantee.

But the effortless mystique of a live show is hardly achieved without effort. Theatre relies on a tireless cast and crew whose occupation demands they work at least 6 days a week. It is not a mass-distributed entertainment but a near-tangible adventure and the effort that goes into every show is reflected in the cost of a ticket. Ticket prices—though relatively unchanged from before the lockdown—are still expensive, ranging from $30 to $400, depending on the show and the seating.

With tourism in New York at an all-time low and COVID-19 restrictions complicating travel, it is difficult to imagine a theatre reaching its maximum capacity. Yet, it is equally difficult to imagine a world in which live theatre is obsolete.

After Broadway's shutdown, thousands of arts and entertainment workers lost their only source of income and were forced to rely on unemployment benefits or charity from organizations like The Actors Fund. Broadway's closure also marked the temporary stop of an economic engine. According to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, arts and cultural activity accounts for 4.5% of the country's gross-domestic product. Theatre is more than a historical staple of New York City, it is also a determinant of livelihood for those who have dedicated their lives to its craft. Theatre reporter Michael Paulson describes Broadway as "a sort of barometer of the city's health. With Broadway closed, New York appears to be ailing. With Broadway reopening, recovery seems possible."

Though attendance numbers are not as high as they could be, this is not an indicator of a dying art but rather an accurate measure of a city that is still healing—a city that will need its arts to do so.

Broadway's reinvigorating effect was undeniable from the audience's reactions to their favourite musicals finally returning. On the night of its reopening, *The Phantom of the Opera* crew carried the celebration out to the street. The audience left the Majestic Theatre to find Andrew Lloyd Webber, the musical's composer, in a DJ booth playing club remixes of *Phantom* classics, while chorus members danced on the marquee behind him and the gathering crowds cheered with delight. The cast of *Hadestown* had a similar idea and held a sing-along from the balcony of the Walter Kerr Theatre, with the audience spilling out into the street and leaping to catch the red roses being thrown down by the crew.

Lin Manuel Miranda, who wrote and starred in *Hamilton* during its original run, surprised the audience on the night of its reopening with a heartfelt speech welcoming them back to the Richard Rodgers Theatre. He thanked everyone for getting vaccinated and asked, "I don't ever want to take live theatre for granted ever again, do you?" which was met with a resounding no.
Rightfully so.

In the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world has certainly changed, but there is reassurance to be found in the arts and reassurance of humanity's simplest self. We seek stories and beauty, intimacy and connection. There is an authenticity to live theatre that cannot be replicated in other forms of entertainment or replaced by a recording on a silver screen. Though a complete recovery may be gradual, Broadway's return is nevertheless a great triumph for our beloved human arts.

Let's Talk About Sex!

Jessica Khorana
ARTS AND CULTURE

When you hear the word "sex," your mind probably flashes to scenes from *Fifty Shades of Grey* or the *Riverdale* kids going at it like rabbits (seriously, where are the adults on this show?), or Samantha regaling the rest of the girls with her latest exploit on *Sex and the City*. But contrary to how it's portrayed in the media, sex isn't just quickies in the backseat of a car (which is *extremely* uncomfortable) or the "perfect" fairytale moment where you finally lose your virginity. It can be messy, or romantic, or painful, or all of those things!

The great thing about having sex portrayed in the media is that it normalizes the topic to kids and opens up discussion, rather than shrouding it with words like "taboo" and "dirty." That being said, how does the media influence our attitudes towards sex? How young is "too young" for to be exposed to the idea? Do shows like *Gossip Girl* and *Bridgerton* set unrealistic expectations for sex and encourage insecurity? In order to find out, I interviewed a random group of students at U of T for their thoughts on sex and the media, and the responses were very revealing.

Interestingly enough, I found that of the students interviewed, about 61% reported always seeing references to sex in the media, with only 33% claiming to see references to sex in the media often, and a measly 5.6% that reported seeing references to sex sometimes. In addition, 50% of participants responded that they had learned about sex between the ages of 9-12. When asked about how they learned about sex, the majority of students responded that they had learned through popular media (i.e. reading books, watching TV and movies) and talking with their friends. Despite learning about sex at what is arguably a young age, around 61% of individuals stated that sex was never actively discussed in their households when growing up, with one participant claiming, "[Sex] wasn't shamed or discouraged, but it was never explicitly talked about."

Based on this data alone, it seems as though the only form of sexual education that our generation received was through a silver screen or the pages of a raunchy novel read underneath the covers. With this in mind, you would think that this would have muddled our perceptions of sex or created an idealized version of what sex should be. However, what we find is the exact opposite! When individuals were asked about what they believe sex is or should be, all the responses consisted of positive, healthy interpretations that went beyond a heteronormative lens. For instance, one individual expressed, "Sex can be so many things — exploring your sexuality, self-pleasure, partner sex, etc. Experiencing pleasure or helping another feel pleasure can all count towards sex." Another participant stated that in their journey to unlearn unrealistic and potentially harmful expectations surrounding sex, they were "avoiding rigid boundaries and letting sex present itself in whatever form feels authentic, safe, and pleasurable."

In the absence of formal education on the topic of sex, exposure to the subject — even through glimpses of *Cosmopolitan* or steamy scenes on TV— may have actually allowed kids to learn enough about the topic to be comfortable with it and develop a more sex-positive attitude. "Sex is something that can be amazing and desirable but can also be dangerous depending on the context," one participant wrote, "Sex is a very vulnerable act, so I believe that sex, as much as it should be pleasurable and exciting and adventurous, etc., it must also be safe and comforting." As we can see, even though popular media has had a significant influence on our views on sex and sexual identity (according to 55.6% of those surveyed), this hasn't necessarily been a negative or damaging influence. Being informed no matter what the means is what prevents individuals from making poor choices and putting themselves in harm's way — not knowing about sex can *lead* to unsafe sex.

While I can understand the desire of some parents to avoid the ensuing awkwardness of having "the talk" with their kids and their desire to have to think about their child ever having sex, the complete lack of acknowledgement towards the subject and subsequent stigma can do substantially more harm than a ten-year-old hearing a sex joke on *Friends*. Personally, I find myself relating quite strongly to the experiences described by those surveyed. Growing up as the eldest daughter in an Indian-Canadian family, the word "sex" was never so much as *breathed* in our house. Likely resulting from a combination of fierce overprotectiveness and millennia of Indian parents that *thrived* on arranged marriages and shaming any sexual act, my parents never so much as even mentioned dating and sex. In fact, in my almost twenty years of age, I have never actually gotten "the talk." And while some of you may be laughing uproariously at this or envious of the fact that I never had to sit through my mother attempting to explain to me how to put on a condom, when combined with the fact that the only form of sexual education my high-school provided was a five-minute lecture on abstinence and a phallic object aptly named "Woody," I would have been completely oblivious to sex had it not been for the media. Being exposed to shows and movies where sex could be casually discussed and reading books and magazines where it was depicted as "healthy" and "normal" helped me to understand and establish my own sexual identity and realize that sex wasn't something that was "wrong" or "taboo."

What I'm trying to get at here is that even though it seems as though sex is everywhere we look — in the songs we listen to or the shows we watch — in a society where most parents still (unconsciously or purposefully) condemn the idea of sex when it comes to their own children, these shows and movies and books are useful resources for kids to normalize sex and can potentially obtain a healthy depiction of what sex is.

Everything Is Fine

Ke Xu
CREATIVE

The age-old question has finally been answered: we are not alone. Things aren't looking great in the long term, but we've learned to take things day by day and appreciate the little things in life. On the bright side, the world has never been a more fair and equitable place to live.

It's been a year since the first explosive missile hit the surface of the Earth, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. No one realized the magnitude of what had happened until two months later when another one was dropped, this time in Central Africa. Chad was devastated, and its bordering countries settled into a state of mass chaos. Of course, nobody really cared about the second missile either, but it was more of an inconvenience than the first, especially for ExxonMobil stakeholders who had suffered financial losses from the temporary disruption of crude oil exports. Fortunately, as many oil reserves were protected from impact debris, the employees in Chad were soon able to reboot the mining process.

It wasn't until one of the missiles landed about five hundred kilometres off of the coast of San Francisco that the case finally garnered international media attention. At once, the United Nations Security Council gathered in New York City to convene and debate about the fate of the world. Not 20 hours later, the alien attacks were declared an international emergency, and the entire world began to shut down. Seafaring was first to go, followed by air travel, and then finally all cross-border mobility. The governments of the six great powers had deemed all forms of recreational travel unnecessary and unsafe, and the world had successfully entered a state of quasi-siege.

To investigate the origin of the attacks, the American government sent a research team to Chad. Unfortunately, the missile was still active at the time and went off again, taking the lives of the twelve esteemed scientists. This saddening news was broadcast all throughout the world; the brave individuals were immortalized as martyrs of the human race. The programme was especially popular in China, a country that had not yet received one of these missile attacks, but would come to do so in the months ahead.

Undeterred, the United States continued to investigate the nature of the invading forces. Not to be one-upped, the United Kingdom would soon launch its own task force, scattering deployments over the next six months. Initially, the governments were quick to point fingers at none other than infamous North Korea. After all, the nation already held both the technology to make nukes and a long-standing vendetta against every other nation of the world. What's to say that they hadn't spent the past decade developing a more targeted and less environmentally destructive version of the atomic bomb? The world was up in arms. North Korea, as always, remained nonchalant.

The cold war continued to brew until about a month ago when the aliens decided to really go all offensive on us.

No one saw it coming, or, at least none of the powers. South Africa had mentioned during one of the conferences that the missile attacks seemed to hint at a looming crisis, but the others just laughed. Our alien neighbours seized this opportunity to get a head start. During the eighth deliberation session, they climbed out of the Pacific Ocean and began to abduct college students from the campuses of the American West Coast. The President of the United States immediately assumed martial law.

To his surprise, this tactic was unsuccessful. The aliens spread out and started to abduct people from all over the country. Initially, it was discovered that the aliens were targeting people who were living or travelling alone. Upon further inspection, it appeared that diverse communities were the least likely to be affected by the alien abductions. As this news broke out, Americans, out of fear for their own safety, warmed up to other races and ethnicities. Black Americans, White Americans, Latin Americans, Asian Americans, and Native Americans formed communes where they would live together under the protection of mutual acceptance and peace.

Racism was now gone. Gone were the days of discrimination, of racial slurs, of hate crimes. Everyone depended on one another, and there was no sense in hating someone who could keep you alive. Even the most outspoken racial supremacists had either learned to bite their tongue or had already been abducted. All in all, not a bad day for racism.

That brings us to today, one month into communal living. The government is still trying to figure out what happened to the people who have been abducted, but their efforts are futile. The only way to protect ourselves is to continue accepting and tolerating others. Everyone has the same opinion now, the same correct stance on the politics of skin colour. If anyone tries to revert back to our archaic racist ways, they will be immediately kicked out of their commune and not allowed to return. Nobody knows where these people go after they are forcibly removed. The only thing that everyone else knows is that once someone is kicked out of the shelter, they are never seen again.

In certain areas of the United States such as in the Midwest, Black, Asian, and Native Americans are very scarce. People have been forced to take over schools, churches, and shopping malls, creating giant communities with only 2 or 3 people of colour each. Minority families are separated and placed in different communities to balance out the ratios as much as possible. No one has complained or protested against this, and why should they? Obviously keeping people alive is more important than keeping families together. Everyone agrees. Everyone agrees on everything nowadays. Since much of the Midwest is wildly rural, these communities are often miles apart, but human lives are more important than individual desires. People of colour should be concerned about the well-being of white Americans too. How could they live with themselves if they took a risk to go and visit their family, only to return to the commune to find 2000 of their friends gone, abducted by the enemy? Colour should be meaningless, but the aliens clearly do not agree. Therefore, it is an unfortunate but necessary reality that every community needs people of colour. With great power comes great responsibility.

In more conventionally diverse areas such as metropolitan New York, people of colour have a little more flexibility in who they choose to reside with. Large cities generally contain a majority liberal population, and people of all races had already lived in harmony for decades leading up to the invasion (other than the shootings, but we don't talk about that). Nothing is supposed to change, right? We all agree that people who discriminate pose a great danger to society, and therefore should be promptly removed from the vicinity of people who are actually trying to survive. On the other hand, human lives are more important than individual comfort, and in areas of the city such as Washington Heights and the Bronx, white Americans are now being actively sought after to ensure the safety of the majority POC population. By now, options are pretty slim, and it's too often that citizens of poor areas with a smaller white population must settle for roommates who may be most accurately described as rather undesirably tempered. Fortunately, compatibility isn't the end all be all anymore. Some things must be sacrificed so that we can all live to enjoy life. Isn't life swell? Now if the aliens would just stop attacking us.

People have always said that the only way to achieve world peace is for aliens to invade Earth, and I think that we've finally proven them right. Everyone is so happy now! We are all equal. Politics are redundant. There is no more need for violence and crime. Everybody lives every day in codependent harmony. Racism is gone, people get along much nicer, and best of all, everyone agrees on everything.

On The River

Eva Chang
CREATIVE

A/N: June is a nonbinary character, and they are referred to using they/them pronouns.
"Camp and tragedy are antitheses. There is seriousness in Camp... but there is never, never tragedy."

— Susan Sontag, "Notes on Camp"

The two never established any dressing protocol, though they intended to beat each other in style every time they hung out. Agni, lavishly decorated with lace, soft like a painting. June, adorned with silver, sharp like a photograph. The two's fashion choices, more often than not, were respected, yet scorned, by the other. They joked from time to time that they broke up for this sole reason. Though it nonetheless seemed to be half the reason they got together to fuck these days.

"I like your outfit," June remarked, eyeing Agni up and down. He wore a white shirt, ruffled along the collar and the sleeves, and unbuttoned one more button than it really should have been, exposing a neck decorated with layered pearl chokers and necklaces. It would have been a histrionically awful shirt, if not for the pattern of the ruffles imitating that of an Iris Van Herpen design. He sported dress shoes and brown trousers, his shirt half-tucked in at the high—waist beltline.

Agni stood at the opposite end of the door, the distance between them emanating a palpable emptiness. Still, he grinned, lifting up the takeout he brought to eye level—a plastic bag stamped with overlapping red "thank you"'s—with flair, hitting different poses as if he were modelling a purse. "You too."

June hummed in confirmation, looking down at their sweater. It was black but nearly sheer and ripped and shredded across the body. Safety pins and charms adorned it, chains criss-crossing along their chest. A simple silver-lock necklace wrapped around their neck. Multiple belts adorned their waist and stacks of silver rings were placed meticulously on their long, thin fingers. Black ribbons decorated their ankle socks.

The clothing was both a shield and an invite—come undress me. I dare you. I bet you can't.

June motioned Agni to come in.

Agni knew exactly where to sit: the left side of June's beaten up brown couch, where he'd always settled. June's cozy apartment glowed with purple light.

"You've decorated," Agni said, looking at the fairy lights draped over the back wall window. The lights were stuffed into empty orange pill bottles. Another one of June's depraved DIY projects. "Nice."

"Why, thank you."

"How have you been?" June, meanwhile, poured out two glasses of wine. They passed one to Agni before settling down on the far right side of the couch.

Swallowing, Agni picked up his wineglass, taking a large sip. "Saw my sister today."

"Is she getting better?"

"Yeah, the symptoms are definitely going away. I just wish I could've stayed longer."

"But it was good to see her?"

Agni smiled, and it said everything that it needed to.

"Ah. I'm glad."

While Agni downed the rest of the wine, they took the time to revel in the silence, which felt like a newfound joy in their reborn relationship. June reached under the coffee table and pulled out a large wooden box.

Agni furrowed his eyebrows. "What is that?"

"Well. We're two insufferable switches and we don't know how to make up our minds, and I thought the idea of competition might make us more horny. Because we're depraved." Opening the box revealed a deck of cards and a set of neatly placed-together poker chips. "Texas hold'em. Whoever wins gets to be in charge tonight."

"Sexually?"

"Sexually."

Agni stared June straight in the eyes. "Okay, you're on. I'm gonna win, though."

June, accustomed to such bravado, shot back a 'we'll see' glance and took out the box's contents. "Just promise to not go all in immediately. Let's at least try to make this fun."

"That's what she said."

June looked straight at Agni in pure judgement. Without a change in expression, they pressed their middle and pointer fingers against their lips, sticking their tongue out and flicking it up and down between their fingers. Agni laughed, the ruffles on his shirt sleeves bouncing in unison with his shoulders.

It had been that back and forth from before the breakup. That push and pull. That banter.

"Okay. I'll be big blind, you be little blind. Check." June put two white chips between them.

"Call." Agni put two in as well.

Check, check. Agni raised conservatively and won when the two revealed their cards: two pair, high card. June, fueled by revenge, raised higher the next round, with their bluffing tactics effectively making Agni fold. Grinning, June took the chips in the middle and brought them to their side of the couch.

"Raise fifty. Someone's in a good mood," Agni remarked.

June grinned, mordantly. "Bro. You're missing out on all the times when it hurts real bad." Staring up at their pill string lights, June absent-mindedly placed in a couple more chips. "Fun fact, but you make me feel good." They tugged on the chain around their neck, before bringing their arms across their chest, hiding its holes.

Agni, meanwhile, fondled his chips, turning them over in his palms. "You do too."

The two of them hesitated, but it was not a hesitation marked by the thought of *'you mean nothing to me.'* It was more so a *'you can't mean this much to me. Not anymore.'*

"All in," Agni finally said, pushing his chips to the center. June cocked their head. "What? You said give it a few rounds. It's been a few."

June fondled with the two cards they had, contemplating whether their hand was strong enough to beat out such a confident wager. They didn't take long to also push their chips in, almost as if they could read Agni's mind. The two flipped their cards over, and June's hand won over Agni's by a landslide.

Agni sighed in defeat, though more so for dramatic effect than any disappointment. He flung his cards down and put his hands up. "Alright, you win."

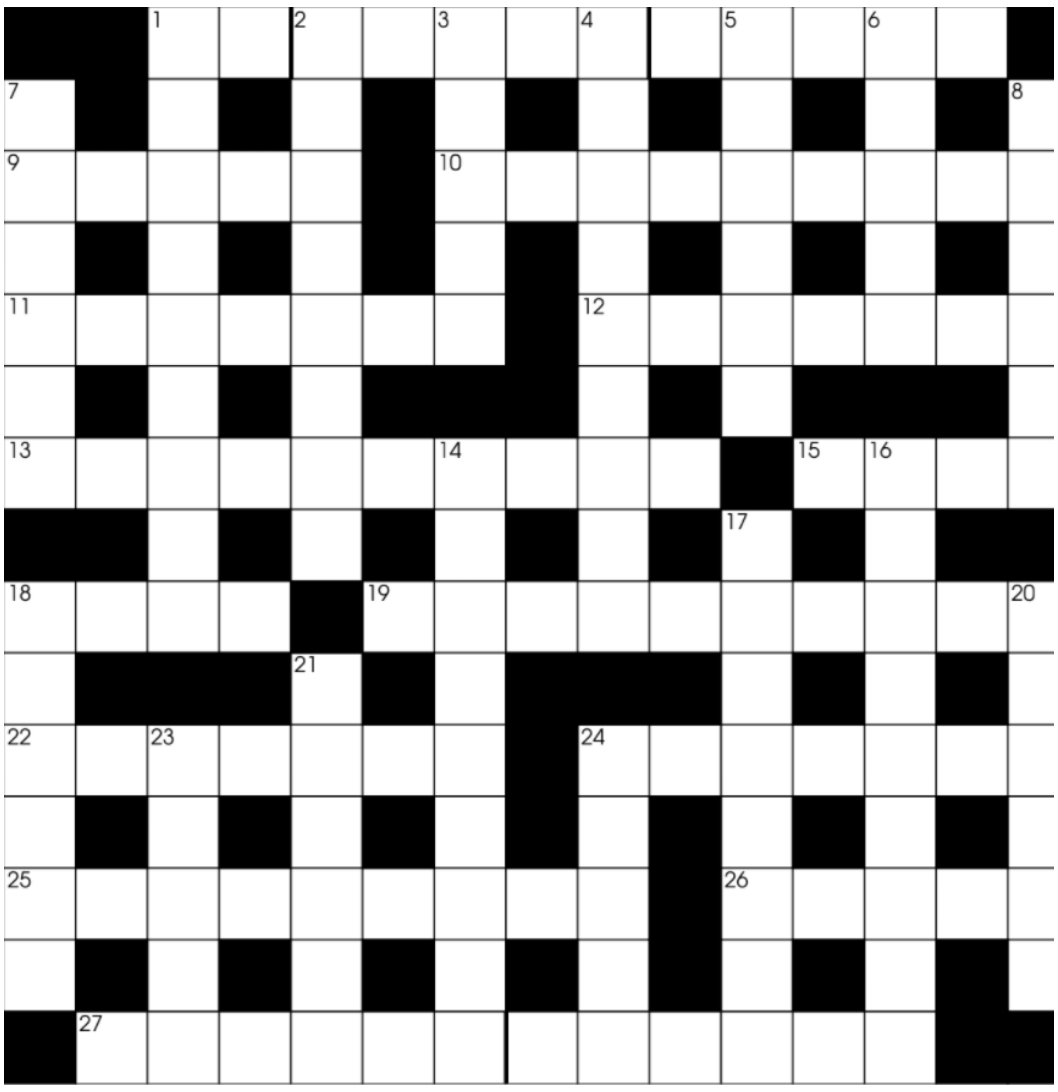
Slowly, June leaned across the couch, their silver jewelry jingling with their movement. Fuzzy from wine, Agni soaked up their image, letting June part his collar. June grinned, sitting back down more quickly than they had leaned forward. They brought all the chips into their arms, pulling them towards their side of the couch. "I win."

June took no time to leap forward again and pin Agni down by the wrists. They were a tangle of fabric and skin, June on top of Agni, planting kisses along his neck.

It wasn't long until the two began to undress.

CROSSWORD

COURTESY OF RISHIBH PRAKASH



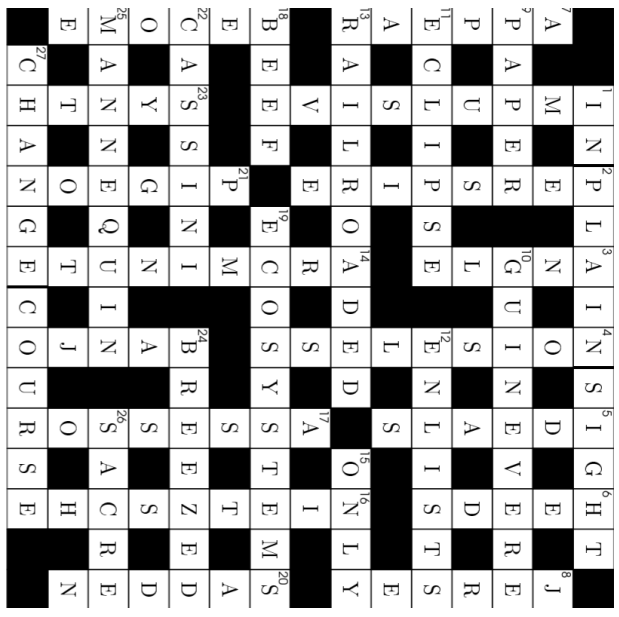
ACROSS

1. Best place to hide something (2, 5, 5)
9. A rock's nemesis (5)
10. Arthur's wife (9)
11. Overshadow (sometimes literally!) (7)
12. Joins (7)
13. Forced into a situation (10)
15. Just (4)
18. Fight (but not one amongst Hindus!) (4)
19. Biological communities (10)
22. Space probe sent to study Saturn in 1997 (7)
24. Easily passed by (7)
25. Dummy (9)
26. French exclamation: "____ bleu" (5) 27. Go in a different direction (6, 6)

DOWN

1. Acting on a whim (9)
2. Sweat (8)
3. Could be right or obtuse (5)
4. Silent (9)
5. Values (6)
6. Takes note of (5)
7. Come out of nowhere (6)
8. There's a new one in the US (6)
14. 1/60 of a degree (9)
16. Author of Beyond Good and Evil (9)
17. One who evaluates the quality of goods (8)
18. Turn into (6)
20. Upset (6)
21. Passengers and messengers (sing.) (6)
23. Electronic musical instrument (abbr.) (5)
24. String instrument (5)

ANSWER KEY



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